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ABSTRACT

In 1972, the Student Counseling Center at Illinois State University initiated a paraprofessional program to assist students of the university in meeting their needs. This paper discusses the role, selection process, training, and supervision of the 72 undergraduate students currently employed in the program. The general role of these paraprofessionals includes peer counseling, information, and referral duties. Additionally, each student is assigned to work in a program area in either the Student Counseling Center or the Academic Advisement Center. In-service training for the paraprofessionals begins with a three-day workshop in the Spring semester and another in the Fall prior to the beginning of the second year. During the academic year, this training is conducted through a university class, "Student Advisor Laboratory", for which each participant receives three credit hours. The author discusses several critical elements which must be developed and maintained in such a paraprofessional program. (Author)

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The Development of the Undergraduate Paraprofessional: Selection, Training and Supervision

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Selection and Initial Training of the Paraprofessional

R. James Clack
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In 1972, the Student Counseling Center at Illinois State University initiated a paraprofessional program to assist students of the university in meeting their needs. The role of the paraprofessional was defined as being a peer counselor, a source of information pertaining to the campus it's operation rules and procedures, and being a referral agent for other campus and community agents. The paraprofessionals are housed in University residence halls; however, they have no obligation or duties pertaining to the management function of the residence halls. All selection, training, supervision and support of the paraprofessionals is the responsibility of the Student Counseling Center. Currently, 72 undergraduate students are employed in the paraprofessional role. Pay for the paraprofessionals is equivalent to the cost of room and board for one academic year and is paid every two weeks in the form of checks.

The role of the paraprofessional is divided into two major areas, a general role and a program role. The general role includes the peer counseling, information, and referral duties which the parapro is trained to make available to any fellow student. Additionally, each parapro is assigned to work in a program area in either the Student Counseling Center or the Academic Advisement Center. Sample program roles include parapros serving as peer advisors in the Academic Advisement process, as small group facilitators in Counseling Center outreach programs such as interpersonal skills workshops, human sexuality seminars, black-white relations groups and a variety of vocational exploration and life planning workshops.

Over the three years of program operation, the criteria used in the selection of paraprofessionals has evolved. Currently, six major criteria are applied in the selection of paraprofessionals: interpersonal skills, motivation, entrepreneur orientation, grade point average, year in school, and flexibility and acceptance of different life styles.

The selection process for paraprofessionals is as follows. Students are requested to apply and to have three personal recommendations forwarded to the selection committee. The application form includes demographic data, previous work experiences, previous organizational memberships and responsibilities, and questions regarding motivation and skill applicants see themselves having. Each applicant is then interviewed by a pair of current paraprofessionals. This initial interview is for evaluation purposes and also to clarify the description and requirements for applicants. The interview includes a role playing situation for the purpose of assessing the applicant's interpersonal and helping skills. At the conclusion of this session, the interviewers complete an evaluation and rating form and forward it to the selection committee which is composed of three paraprofessionals and three Counseling Center staff. The committee then evaluates the applications, recommendations and first interview evaluations. The number of prospective employees is then reduced to approximately twice the number needed for the coming year.

The next step in the selection process is small group interviews and individual interviews with a professional staff member for each of the remaining applicants. Three hour small group sessions with about ten applicants per group are held. The purpose of this experience is to further evaluate interpersonal skill, flexibility, and ability to function in small

group settings. The groups are co-led by trained graduate students while a staff member observes for evaluative purposes and completes an evaluation form for each participant. Each applicant then has a 30 minute interview with a professional staff member of the Counseling Center, who completes an evaluative form.

Finally, on the basis of applications, recommendations, paraprofessionals' interview evaluation, group interview evaluation, and professional interview evaluation, the committee makes its final selections.

Initial Training of the Paraprofessional:

Newly selected paraprofessionals attend a three day residential workshop at the conclusion of the school year where they receive basic training in information dissemination, referral procedures, and helping skills. They then join the veteran parapros for five days pre-service training immediately prior to the start of the fall semester.

Information and referral training is accomplished primarily through didactic input by professional staff members, through small group discussions combining new with veteran paraprofessionals, and through reference to the S.A. Manual which includes information covering over 150 campus and community resource agencies including contact and referral procedures.

Peer counseling skills training is accomplished through the use of a microcounseling training paradigm. Using this training concept, parapros are instructed in the following skills: attending behavior, open-ended responding, minimal client encouragement, paraphrasing and reflection of feeling, goal-setting, and a sequence for decision-making. This skill training is presented with a conceptual model of peer counseling which defines the helping process

as assisting others to explore and define their situation or problem, state their goals, and develop and implement a course of action. The major components used in the training are skill descriptions, modeling, video simulations, supervised role-playing, and feedback. Both professional staff and selected veteran paraprofessionals are used as trainer/supervisors in this process.

Finally, during training, the parapros participate in a growth group experience structured to assist them in evaluating their strengths and weaknesses as helpers and to explore and develop strategies for improving as helpers.

In-Service Training and Supervision of Paraprofessionals

Francis E. LaFave
Illinois State University

In a large scale paraprofessional program, in-service training and on-going supervision play crucial roles. The former provides for the continuing development of knowledge and skills while supervision is the process which translates training into improved behavioral effectiveness. In our program, in-service training for paraprofessionals begins with a 3-day workshop in the Spring semester and another in the Fall prior to the beginning of the school year. The objectives of these workshops are: (1) To orient new paraprofessionals to the Counseling Center; its broad objectives and their particular roles within that organization, and (2) to begin their skills training in both individual and group helping skills. Details of these workshops have been discussed by the previous presenter.

During the academic year, this training is conducted through a university class, Student Advisor Laboratory, for which each paraprofessional receives three credit hours for enrollment. Training emphasis in this course primarily relates to the paraprofessional's general helping role, particularly such functions as information dissemination, referral training and crisis intervention. (A brief topical syllabus of the current course is attached to our handout). In addition, the approach utilized in the course allows for continued skill development by using the micro-counseling laboratory method. Content situations are selected from class input materials and from paraprofessionals personal experiences.

In-service training related to the particular program area a paraprofessional might be assigned (i.e., outreach, career development, academic advisement, etc.) is accomplished in a different manner. Each professional

staff person responsible for a specific program area conducts training of both his professional and paraprofessional staff together. This way, paraprofessionals are actively involved in not only the delivery of a particular service, but in the planning and evaluation as well. Skills and relationships unique to that particular activity are developed cooperatively between all levels of staff involved in the particular program. Supervision of the paraprofessional is built into the program format. Cohesiveness and a sense of involvement on the paraprofessionals part are easily developed in this training format.

Perhaps the most crucial dimension of our system and certainly the most difficult to develop is the professional-paraprofessional relationship relating to the general peer counseling role. A professional staff person, designated as a trainer/supervisor is delegated the responsibility for a group of paraprofessionals in a particular living area (usually 6-9). The professional staff persons role is to be both a resource person and a source of supervision for the paraprofessional's informal peer counseling contacts. In addition, it is hoped this relationship may also provide a helping context which the paraprofessional may utilize to work on his/her own personal growth issues. Finally, it hopefully provides the professional staff person with some feedback about the current student environment; at least that segment which the paraprofessional comes in contact with. While this role is critical in terms of both training and daily communication, it is also the most complex to develop and maintain. Such issues as gaining trust, looking good in front of your professional supervisor, and so on, all enter into this relationship.

In summary, I would like to suggest that in a large paraprofessional program, particularly one with multiple functions such as ours, several critical elements must be developed and maintained through in-service training and supervision. First, a system to insure the continuing development of paraprofessionals is essential. A key element of this on-going development must be a system of professional/paraprofessional relationship which can deal with the personal development of individual paraprofessionals. Secondly, a network of inter-group communications must be created to allow feedback sufficient to measure the impact of counseling activities and to conduct appropriate supervision of paraprofessional behavior. Without clear conceptions of responsibilities and lines of communication, a multiple function large scale program can easily develop serious morale problems.

STUDENT ADVISOR LABORATORY

SYLLABUS

The following topical areas are dealt with in this course:

Basic Dimensions of Community Mental Health

A brief exposure, through lectures and reading of the current ideas and dimensions of community mental health. Emphasis will be placed on the role of paraprofessionals in improving services.

Role Definition and Functions of Student Advisors

Given the principles and goals of mental health agencies in general as a context, discussion of the Student Advisor role, its purpose and goals, is presented. This is designed to follow-up pre-employment workshop training in this area.

Basic Interpersonal Helping Skills

A conceptual model and several skills basic to effective helping interviews are presented, modeled and practiced via role playing experience. This is a major dimension of the course. Approximately one-third to one-half of the semester will be spent in skill development.

Small Group Leadership Techniques

Several basic skills related to the leading of small groups for educational or personal growth reasons are presented. In addition, some common group dynamics issues are reviewed. Practice leading groups under supervision is included.

Crisis Intervention

The basic approaches to handling interpersonal crisis as well as the referral and support resources available are reviewed, simulated and practiced in role playing situations.

Suicide

Basic principles of dealing with this specialized situation of crisis intervention are dealt with. Current principles of suicide assessment and treatment are discussed and practiced in role playing situation.

Depression

Basic elements of depression and helping reactions to deal with depressed individuals are discussed, simulated and role played.

Environmental Assessment Techniques

Skills in learning how to assess whether or not various elements of the I.S.U. environment are contributing positively or negatively to student growth are discussed. A written instrument is utilized to give Student Advisors practice in assessing elements. The instrument is used in their job setting.

Drug Education

Basic understanding of behavioral symptoms of various drug usage and training in appropriate helping reactions to such behavior. Emphasis is on initial assessment and reaction to situations resulting from drug misuse.

Career Development

Discuss the basic conceptual framework of the Counseling Center Career Development Program. Familiarization with programs such as Life Planning Workshops, Career Development Seminars and Career Exploration Groups in order to refer students accurately to these services.

Human Sexuality

To develop an awareness of basic concepts of human sexuality, the general developmental problems students face in the sexuality area, and the techniques utilized to help students deal with their sexual development in a positive manner.

Homosexuality

To develop an awareness of homosexuality and a sensitivity to students concerned about their sexual identity.

Academic Advisement

Use of the basic information necessary for Student Advisors to understand University requirements, discuss academic policy with students and assist them in the selection and planning of courses is focused upon. Case situations representing typical problem areas are presented.

Ethical Guidelines

The ethical principles guiding Student Counseling Center operation are explained with particular emphasis on the implications of these for Student Advisors in their paraprofessional roles. Particular stress is placed upon confidentiality of communications in helping roles with students.

A Paraprofessionals' Perspective on Paraprofessional Programs

Introduction

My name is Jim Clarkson. I am a twenty-four year old veteran and a Junior at Illinois State University.

My part of this program on "The Development of the Undergraduate Paraprofessional: Selection, Training and Supervision" is to focus on my experiences and reactions as an undergraduate paraprofessional helper..

Before I begin to tell you about my experiences and reactions, I would like to define what I mean by the term "paraprofessional helper". To me, a paraprofessional helper is a person without the formal credentials for a "professional" position in a given social agency. Thus a person may be considered as a paraprofessional in one setting and as a professional in another.

Experience with PATH Telephone Crisis Center

My experience as a paraprofessional helper began upon my return to college after the service. At that time, I was selected and trained as a volunteer with PATH Telephone Crisis Center in Normal, Illinois.

Selection was by application and interview with one of the volunteers who was also a graduate student in Counseling Psychology at Illinois State. The interview focused on my reasons for becoming a volunteer and my expectations for the role.

Training as a volunteer included five group sessions and five phone room training sessions over a five week period. Training consisted of an orientation and how to handle drug calls, suicidal calls, sexual calls and a final review. Role playing was the major training method and the communication skills were limited to paraphrasing and reflection of feelings responses.

After initially finding a good deal of personal satisfaction in listening to and talking with callers about their situations, and after showing interest in the center, I was asked to become a trainer/supervisor. As I continued working on the phones and in training, I began to question and doubt that paraphrasing and reflection were enough to help callers find ways of dealing with their crisis situations. I began to question the focus of training upon informational facts without an equal focus on effective helper attitudes and training in decision-making skills.

After I was at PATH approximately six months, I was appointed to a vacancy on the Board of Directors. Here I began to see the problems and politics of operating a community agency. I began to see the lack of internal communication in the center and the lack of a consistent on-going training format with qualified trainers which I consider the basis of an effective lay helping service. Seeing that the necessary changes in training, supervision and communication were being undermined by a leadership powerplay, between the director and the board, I became a bit overly idealistic and frustrated and resigned after approximately a year at PATH.

Experience as a Student Advisor

Selection for my role as a Student Advisor was accomplished through an application, an interview and role plays with two paraprofessionals, a small group discussion, and an interview with a senior staff member.

Training was in four major sections: Initial and on-going training for the general peer counseling role and initial and on-going training for the specific program role.

Initial training for the general peer counseling role, I found to be useful and informative. It included information about various campus resources and communication skills training which included a decision-making model for helping others.

On-going training for the general role was in my opinion poor, in that it consisted of lectures about the internal working of various campus offices. I had hoped for more of a personal/professional growth experience; for dealing with the issues involved in paraprofessional helping and for more training in handling various situations (i.e., crisis intervention, groups).

During my first semester as a Student Advisor, I found that the dorm reminded me of the barracks, which turned me off. Most of the guys were approximately five years younger than me and we were coming from different directions. I tended to be rather quiet and enjoyed a slower style of living, while most of the people in my dorm lived much faster.

I didn't relate well to the people as a whole, and thus found myself lacking as a helper, which I think made me even more cautious and quiet. I did help initiate and develop a dorm human relations committee to deal with the black/white problems and worked with a few people on an irregular basis.

It was also during this first semester that I took Dr. Clack's undergraduate course "Communication Skills in Helping Relationships". While the course emphasized listening to others and helping them to come to their own answers, I found myself pushing courses in Academic Advisement. A good number of the students who came through Academic Advisement were unsure of their academic and career goals. Using the communication skills I was learning, I tried to help them explore their interests and abilities to a limited degree. I felt a greater desire to help the students I saw to find some meaning in being in school than in telling them what courses they <u>should</u> take. I often took "too much time" with students while the administrative idea was to "get them in and get them out", an attitude I had gotten fed up with in the service.

After a rather nasty confrontation with my supervisor in Academic Advisement, I was reassigned to the general outreach program, the second semester, in which I became a skills trainer/supervisor with Dr. Clack in his communication skills course.

It was during this second semester that I began developing a training manual for lay helpers. Having been through PATH training and Student Advisor training, I found them both lacking a practical, easily digestable rap guide/training supplement that lay helpers could refer to. The manual was to show helpers how to handle various situations (crisis intervention, small group leadership, referral, and interviews) and to serve as a supplement to the training program, especially skills training.

Current Position

Currently, I am the Coordinator of the Veterans Assistance Service of the Illinois State Veterans Association. With a staff of six student veterans, we offer peer counseling/referral services to local vets.

In addition, I am a trainee/supervisor with two sections of the undergraduate course "Communication Skills and Helping Relationships". I act as a group discussion leader in the basic concepts of helping and in one section also assist in presenting skills.

Conclusion/Recommendations for Paraprofessional Training/Supervision

Both from my experience of being supervised and trained as a paraprofessional helper and from the perspective of training and supervising others, I have reached the following tenative conclusions about the goals and directions of paraprofessional training and supervision.

The goals as I see them are:

1. To help the paraprofessional define his role, to find his limitations and assets in that role, to define his ethical standards and goals for that role.
2. To assist the paraprofessional in his personal growth.
3. To provide the paraprofessional with information of resources, training in skills and abilities to help people make appropriate decisions.

4. To train paraprofessionals in skills to assess and monitor the community helping system.
5. To seek to mutually define the professional paraprofessional relationship.
6. To teach the basic concepts of individual helping and group process.

Trained supervisors could be more effective in their roles if they:

1. View the paraprofessionals as able, as competent and as an effective team member.
2. Have knowledge of quality control methods.
3. Have special training (perhaps a course in their professional training) to train/supervise paraprofessionals.
4. Are willing to relate to the paraprofessional as they want the paraprofessional to relate to others.
5. Are willing to allow the paraprofessionals a significant and influential voice in the policy formation and direction of the program.